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ABSTRACT

This paper is a report of a study which explores the relative contributions of norms, modeling, positive affect, and empathy to generalized reciprocity (prior help by one person leading to greater helpfulness by the recipient toward another person). Preschool children were randomly assigned to one of six groups and individually exposed to two successively presented videotaped models, each of whom was faced with the same sharing decision problem that the subjects were to face later. Half the subjects were told that the recipient of the model's potential charity was an unknown child, while the other half were led to believe they themselves would receive any toys the model chose to share. Three conditions were created within the modeling situation: selfish-selfish condition (both models refused to share), generous-generous condition (both agreed to share), and generous-selfish condition (one agreed and the other disagreed to share). Subsequently, the subjects were given an opportunity to share toys with an unknown recipient. The results of the study failed to confirm predictions based on the reciprocity and affect hypotheses. Modeling played a major role in the experimentally-induced altruistic behavior. (CM)

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A STUDY OF SHARING

by

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Recent theory and research concerning the determinants of altruistic behavior have highlighted the importance of social norms (Bar-Tal, 1976). Two norms, in particular, have received special emphasis: the norm of social responsibility and norm of reciprocity (Bryan & London, 1970; Krebs, 1970). The former norm dictates that an individual should help others in need, regardless of their ability to reciprocate (Berkowitz & Daniels, 1963); the latter prescribes that one should help those who have helped oneself (Gouldner, 1960).

Closely related to these two abstract social prescriptions, but in a way which is not yet perfectly understood, lies the behavioral phenomenon of "generalized reciprocity". Following Staub (1972), this phenomenom may be defined as "prior help by one person leading to greater helpfulness by the recipient toward another person." Although the existence of this putatively altruistic behavior has been repeatedly confirmed, whether or not it should be attributed to the operation of a social norm is not settled. Results from some investigations suggest that the effect may be due entirely to modeling (e.g., Harris, 1970; Test & Bryan, 1969); other studies suggest that subjects who are helped feel better, and this positive affect, alone, is sufficient to instigate altruistic behavior (Krebs, 1970; Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973). In addition to these possibilities, it is clear that empathy may be involved in the phenomenon of generalized reciprocity (Bleda, 1976; Iannotti, 1974). Recipients of a benefactor's magnanimity are not only obliged by the norm of reciprocity to return the favor when given the

opportunity (and reminded of a norm of social responsibility by the charitable gesture) but are brought by the very act of charity to experience the psychological situation of the recipient. The emotional residue of this experience, in turn, may form the basis of later feelings of empathy towards those similarly situated when the recipient comes to enjoy the role of potential benefactor.

In the present study an attempt was made to explore further the relative contributions of norms, modeling, positive affect, and empathy to generalized reciprocity. Prior to being given an opportunity to share toys with an unknown child recipient, six groups of preschool children were individually exposed to two successively presented televised models, each of whom was faced with the same sharing decision that the subject subsequently faced himself. Half of the subjects were led to believe that they were the unknown recipients of the model's potential charity (i.e., they were led to believe that <u>they</u> were to receive whatever toys the model chose to share); the other half were told that the recipient was an unknown child in another room. (The inclusion of the latter group was meant to control for the effects of modeling.) Within both of these groups three further conditions were created to yeild a 2 x 3 factorial experiment. In the first, "selfish-selfish" (SS) condition, both models viewed by the subject consistently <u>refused</u> to share. In the second, "generous-generous" (GG) condition, both models consistently <u>agreed</u> to share. In a third, "generous-selfish" (GS) condition, one model consistently agreed to share, and one consistently refused.[1] Below is a diagram illustrating the design of the study. Each cell represents a group of 13 subjects, varying in age from three to seven years. All subjects were randomly assigned to conditions. Seven of the

[1] The orders generous-selfish and selfish-generous were counterbalanced seven to six in both cells of this condition, and post-hoc analysis revealed no order effect in either cell.

subjects were Black; the remainder were Caucasian; 44 were male and 34 were female. The SES of these children ranged from lower-lower to upper-middle.

Subject Status with Respect to Model's Sharing Behavior

Model Sequence	Observer and Potential Recipient	Observer Only
Generous - Generous		
Generous - Selfish		
Selfish - Selfish		

The suggestion that positive affect is the critical variable in the generalized-reciprocity phenomenon leads to the prediction that in the situation in which the subject is the observer and potential recipient of the model's generosity, children who are in the GG condition should show greater altruism when given the opportunity to share than those in the SS or GS conditions. The same hypothesis suggests that of those subjects in the GG condition, those who were the personal recipient of the model's generosity should be more altruistic than those who merely observed the model give to some anonymous other. Precisely the same two predictions follow from the norm of reciprocity hypothesis.

In contrast to the affect hypothesis and consequences entailed by the norm of reciprocity notion, consideration of the possible influence of empathy leads to the prediction that all three conditions in which the subject is observer and potential recipient should produce greater altruism than the corresponding three control-for-modeling conditions in which the subject

merely observes models sharing or refusing to share with someone else. This prediction follows from the fact that in each of the conditions in which the subject is both observer and potential recipient, the child experiences affect which may form the basis for subsequent feelings of empathy. A second prediction deriving from the notion of empathy is that within the situation in which the subject is both observer and recipient, those subjects experiencing both a generous and a selfish model (i.e., the GS condition) will show more altruism than subjects in the GG or SS conditions. This prediction follows from the consideration that for recipients in the GS condition the difference between the affective consequences of selfishness and generosity is most salient and hence most easily discriminated. Thus, subjects aware of the emotional consequences for a potential recipient of both selfishness and generosity should feel greater empathy for him than those who have experienced only one of these consequences.

Finally, the hypothesis that altruistic behavior in children is merely a function of modeling leads to the prediction that the three model-sequence conditions should be arranged SS < GS < GG with respect to amount of sharing in both the situation in which the child is observer and potential recipient and the situation in which the child is observer only (i.e., no interaction should be discovered).

Owing to its vagueness, no prediction from the norm of social responsibility seemed possible in the present arrangement. Generally speaking, however, since all six conditions remind the subject of this norm, there seems to be no reason to expect any one of them to be more productive of altruism than any other from the standpoint of the norm of social responsibility.

Procedure

Children participated in the experiment on an individual basis and were escorted from their classroom to the experimental chamber by the experimenter (Levy) one at a time. Upon entering the experimental chamber, the subject was informed that he was to play a game, the object of which was to guess which of two buttons on a large box would yield blocks. The blocks could be exchanged for prizes (small toys). Each child was permitted ten such guesses or trials. Five of these trials, according to a prearranged schedule, were fruitless; the other five yielded two blocks each. Each time the child won, he exchanged his blocks for two toys and was immediately given a chance to "share" one of his prizes with an unknown child by placing it in a box referred to by the experimenter as the "sharing box."

Prior to playing this "game" (in actuality the experimental test), each child viewed a video-tape recording of two other children (both of whom were of the same apparent sex as the subject) playing the same game.[2] The point of the tape, the child was told, was "to show you how the game is played." In the GG condition both televised children (hereafter called models) shared their toys at every opportunity. In the SS condition both models consistently refused to share. In the GS condition one model consistently shared and the second consistently refused to share. Half of the children were told that they were the recipients of the model's sharing and in fact received the donated toys prior to playing the game themselves. The other half were told that a child in another room was the recipient and, thus, received no donated toys. All subjects, however, received a number of toys "just to start off with" prior to the beginning of the test which were parcelled out in such manner as to completely equalize the toy

[2]All subjects saw the same two models (one five-year-old boy and one eight-year-old girl). Since the boy had long hair, it was possible by means of clothing changes to make both models appear as either sex.

"affluence" of all subjects at the start of the test. The principal data recorded by the experimenter were the number of toys shared by each child as he played the game.

Results

Results of the study indicated that the order of magnitude of the average number of toys shared in each model sequence condition was: GG > GS > SS ($F = 14.34$, $df = 2, 73$, $p < .001$). (All Duncan-test individual comparisons, $p < .05$.)

There was no appreciable difference in the number of toys shared by subjects in the observer and recipient versus the observer only conditions ($F = .84$, $df = 1, 72$, n.s.) and no interaction between model sequence and the subject's status with respect to the model's sharing behavior ($F = 1.07$, $df = 2, 72$, n.s.).

Discussion

The results of the study failed to confirm all predictions but those drawn from the hypothesis of modeling, both of which were confirmed. Undoubtedly, therefore, modeling plays a major role in experimentally-induced altruistic behavior, especially with young children and in situations, such as the present, where what is expected of the child is ambigous (Bar-Tal, 1976, p. 30). So great was the modeling effect, in fact, that nearly all children used precisely the same verbal expressions as the models throughout the experimental session.

In seeking explanations for the failure of the affect, empathy, and norm of reciprocity predictions to be fulfilled, it may be well to look to the young age of the subjects as the most relevant determining circumstance. Empathy requires the combined exercise of both cognitive and

affective factors (Bleda, 1976). Owing to the immaturity of the subjects (most of whom were five years old or younger) the requisite cognitive factors (e.g., ability to take the role of the other) may have been wanting. It could be true as well that the reciprocity norm, though known to the children, was not yet able to exercise much influence on behavior, somewhat in the same way that sub-vocal verbalization often fails to mediate choice behavior in discrimination tasks with children of this age (see Reese, 1962).

We have no explanation of the failure of the affect hypothesis (Krebs, 1970) to be confirmed. It may well be that it is a principle of very limited applicability.

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Note.--The experiment reported in this paper formed one portion of the junior author's Master's thesis, which was performed under the direction of the senior author.